

TEMPO

Volume 12 *TEMPO* 2013-2014

Article 18

2014

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Recommended Citation

(2014). Student Research: Turning Theories into Success. *TEMPO*, 12 (1). Retrieved from <https://dsc.duq.edu/tempo/vol12/iss1/18>

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Student Research: Turning Theories Into

Five members of the Music Education Graduate Program completed their degrees this past year. Their master's projects spanned an impressive body of action research, with topics covering musicianship in the choral classroom, integrating technology in general music, practice strategies for beginning band students, Orff resources for music educators and assessment approaches in middle school programs. Abstracts from four of these five projects follow. We congratulate the excellence of our graduates and wish them all the best in their future professional endeavors!

Dr. Paul Doerksen, associate professor and chair of Music Education

Carrie Rose Dietsch

"You Want Me To Sing That!?" Improving Musicianship in the Choral Classroom

Over the past few years, I have watched my choir students struggle with sight-reading new music, relying heavily on a piano or vocal demonstration to learn their parts by rote. The purpose of this project was to improve my students' overall musicianship through the development of aural and sight-singing skills. This challenge led me to propose the following research questions:

What are effective ways to integrate aural skills and solfège study into the choral rehearsal?

What is the optimum order for introducing aural skills and solfège study?

What knowledge and skill outcomes are achievable in one school semester?

What is the most efficient method of monitoring individual student progress?

This project was conducted over a 14-week period with my upper school concert choir class. The first 20 minutes of each of our four class periods was devoted to music theory, aural skills training and sight-singing. Students were taught using a variety of mediums including class games, worksheets and performance tasks. They were assessed through weekly written, performance and aural exams.

At the completion of this project, I discovered that the most effective way to integrate aural skills and solfège study into the choral rehearsal was through the class warm-up. The optimum order for introducing solfège study was to begin with the syllables Do-Sol, moving in step-wise motion in major

keys, gradually adding syllables, skipping motion and minor keys. The written music theory knowledge and skill outcomes that are achievable in one school semester include identification of note names, note values, musical symbols, meters, time signatures and major key signatures. The identification of intervals is an achievable aural skill outcome, and sight-singing in major keys with 80 percent accuracy is an achievable solfège study outcome. Finally, the most effective method of monitoring individual student progress was through the use of electronic student portfolios.

The goal of this project was to impart well-rounded musicianship skills to my young vocal students. It is my intention to use the results of this project to improve my own teaching and to modify the methods and practices that I use in my choral classroom. I have made it my mission to change the perspective of my young vocalists from being "singers" to being "musicians." My students will be able to discuss, analyze and—most of all—read music with confidence.

Carrie Rose Dietsch is the middle and upper school choral music teacher at La Jolla Country Day School (LJCDS) in La Jolla, CA. She directs the school's Madrigal Singers, Concert Choir, Mad Men (male a cappella ensemble), and the middle and upper school show choirs. The LJCDS vocal ensembles have performed nationally and internationally, having earned superior ratings at prominent choral festivals. Dietsch also serves as the musical director for the LJCDS middle and upper school musical theater programs. Prior to teaching at LJCDS, Dietsch taught high school vocal and general music for the Girard School District in Girard, PA and elementary vocal music in Shengzhou, China.

Success

Melissa L. Hartman

Integrating Technology into the Middle School General Music Classroom using NETS-S as a Framework: A Pilot Program

Technology has to become an important part of the school environment. Knowing ways to implement technology into the music classroom is crucial to student response and learning. Students learn best through participation and being engaged in the classroom activities. Incorporating technology into the classroom has allowed students to connect with activities on many levels, maintain attention and boost motivation. It has assisted in reaching the other students who are not involved in band and chorus and motivating them to learn. By studying the information for implementing technology into general education classes, along with the implementation of general technology ideas into the music classroom, teachers may provide the best music education to their students, enhanced by high-quality technology.

This study determined whether students in grades seven and eight were motivated and engaged in middle school general music class if technology was present and how it enhanced student achievement. Twenty-one out of ninety-two students (eight 7th graders and thirteen 8th graders) participated. These students actively participated in this study over the course of nine weeks.

Students used iPads and computers during music class. After reviewing many apps, the following were included in the study: *Beatwave*, *GarageBand*, *The Great Composers*, *iMovie* for the iPads, and *MusicAce* and *MixCraft6* for the computers.

During the course of the study, five research questions were answered: What type of instructional technology software for iPad/PC is appropriate to integrate into a middle school general music class? How were technology-enhanced learning experiences used to achieve curricular goals? How did incorporating technology motivate and engage students' learning? How did incorporating technology enhance student achievement? What professional development activities for technology are needed for music educators?

An experimental curriculum was developed to facilitate the use of technology in the music classroom prior to the study and was later revised to reflect students' responses to the technology and the results of the research project. Through the completion of class projects during this study, it was found that students are more motivated to be actively engaged in learning while using some form of technology.

Melissa L. Hartman is a music teacher in the Uniontown Area School District located in Fayette County, PA. She teaches general music K-8, 7th and 8th grade concert band and marching band, and 7th and 8th grade chorus. Hartman has also served as the assistant director for the Uniontown Red Raiders Marching Band and teaches private percussion lessons.

Kimberly Heim

Teaching the How and Why of Practicing: The Creation and Implementation of Effective and Motivational Practice Strategies for Beginning Band Students

Effective practicing habits are important to a musician's skill development throughout his or her instrumental career. This research project aimed to create and implement a practicing pedagogy for beginning band students. My investigation used four research questions to determine the components of a practice routine, types of self-regulated practice strategies, lesson objectives, learning activities and methods to evaluate the effectiveness of the instruction.

My research findings were used to create the objectives and lesson plans for the practicing pedagogy. The lesson sequence included several instructional materials created specifically for the study. Once the materials were created, the lesson plans were implemented into my fourth grade beginning band lessons. Fifteen students within seven lesson groupings participated in the study over the course of 10 weeks. At the end of each lesson, students collaborated with me to create weekly goals for their practice guides. Students were also directed to use practice strategies and materials that encouraged self-regulating and motivating behaviors during their home practicing sessions.

Results showed that student performance and practicing motivation improved due to goal creation, family interaction in practice sessions and use of various practicing strategies. Students were able to describe home practicing sessions in detail and used goals to analyze their performance strengths and weaknesses. Parents were more likely to be involved in home practicing sessions and used the practice guides to communicate questions and comments to me. Students liked to use strategies such as slowing down, repetition and using a metronome app.

Practice routines are beneficial to students when they promote self-regulating and motivational behaviors. Students who actively participate in creating practice goals and analyzing results will be more likely to practice effectively and increase performance skills. Students'

practicing sessions also benefit from active parent involvement. Instrumental music teachers need to integrate practicing skills into the curriculum.

Kimberly Heim is a music teacher in the Neshannock Township School District in New Castle, PA. She teaches instrumental music in grades 4–12 and also teaches junior high general music and choir classes. She directs the Lancer Marching Band, concert band, jazz band, as well as the junior high and elementary instrumental and choral ensembles.

Rachel A. Skilone

“What? We Get a Grade in Band?!” Measurement and Evaluation within a Middle School Group Lesson Setting

After seven years of teaching, I felt that I could implement more effective ways for measuring and evaluating the progress of my middle school band students. I desired for my students, and their parents, to gain a better understanding of the benchmarks that are established within the classroom in order to systematically improve their performance skills. To accomplish this, three questions formed the basis of my project:

How can I *measure* student performance?

How can I *evaluate* student performance and use the results to improve teacher instruction and learning?

How will the students benefit from creating and maintaining portfolios?

Through a nine-week study, I developed an assessment plan that included an establishment of benchmarks, individualized feedback of performance exams through detailed rubrics, the use of practice

journals to discuss areas of progress and the development of online portfolios to showcase student work. This plan was implemented with thirty 5th grade band students within six lesson groups and was evaluated for its efficacy among the teacher and the students.

The assessment plan proved to be successful during the course of the project. The mean and median increased from rubric to rubric, which signified improvement. The average increase from the first performance exam to the final performance exam was 9.7 points. The overall growth in scores proved that the use of rubrics (in connection with practice journals) can lead to more effective teacher instruction and greater student achievement.

By assigning performance tests and using practice journals to promote efficient practicing in preparation for these tests, I was able to use rubrics in collecting the numbers (scores) that I needed to evaluate the effectiveness of my assessment plan. I adapted my instruction based on the outcomes of the rubrics, and it led to optimal student learning in the classroom. Further, by creating and maintaining online student portfolios, I had the ability to provide physical evidence of the instruction and learning that takes place in a band classroom.

Rachel A. Skilone is the 5th and 6th grade band director at Neil Armstrong Middle School in the Bethel Park School District in Bethel Park, PA. She teaches 5th grade group lessons, 5th grade ensemble, 6th grade ensemble, and 6th grade jazz band. Skilone also serves as an assistant director for the Bethel Park Blackhawk Marching Band and teaches private clarinet lessons.

Music Education Program Helps to Create Band Program at St. Benedict the Moor School

Dr. Paul Doerksen, associate professor and chair of Music Education, has worked with St. Benedict the Moor School, a K-8 private school in Pittsburgh's Hill District, as well as the Extra Mile Education Foundation, a philanthropic organization in Pittsburgh, to create and institute a new band program for the school's largely underserved students.

Joelynn Parham, the school's principal, was looking for a way to begin a band program in the school to complement the already successful choral program. She began discussing options with the Extra Mile foundation to help fund a band program at the school. The foundation provided funding and support for brand-new instruments and equipment.

Two junior music education students, Ben Gardner and Cassidy Deutsch, were hired as teachers in the program. They are gaining invaluable teaching and planning experiences in a real classroom prior to their scheduled student teaching experiences.

According to Doerksen, the program has been a great success in its inaugural year, with approximately 50 children in grades four through eight participating. He and Parham are looking forward to an increased enrollment in the program's second and subsequent years.